

Further notes on the pupping period in a recently founded colony of Grey Seals (*Halichoerus grypus*) in the Netherlands

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In a short paper published previously ('T HART et al. 1988), we reported on the birth of Grey Seals, *Halichoerus grypus* (Fabricius, 1791), living on and near a high lying shoal off the Frisian Island of Terschelling, the Netherlands. In that recently founded colony, consisting of only young animals, in the second week of January 1985, the first two just-born Grey Seals were observed. The next two years, two very young specimens were seen during the last week of January, three newly born Grey Seals during the first week of February and 10 days later again two just-born pups were observed. Then we drew attention to the fact that the founders of the colony in the Netherlands almost certainly came from the Farne Islands, where the pupping period is from mid October till mid December with a peak around November 7th.

We believed it interesting to follow the development of the Dutch colony of Grey Seals, in particular the changes in the reproduction period. Thanks to the observations of the pilots of the Air Force base at Leeuwarden, and the staff of the lighthouse "De Brandaris" on the island, we could gather a number of data, supplemented by data on very young animals found beached after heavy storms on nearby lying islands and on the coast of the continent (Table).

Births of Grey Seals in the Netherlands per decade, season 1987/88 to 1990/91

To these births must be added a newly-born male found late October/early November 1990

		December			January			February
1987/1988					xx	xxx		
1988/1989				xx	x	xx		x
1989/1990				xx	xx	x	x	
1990/1991		x	x	xxxxx	x	x		

The data compiled in the table show clearly a shift of the pupping period to an earlier date in the season. This shift confirms the observations by BACKHOUSE and HEWER (1957) that primiparous Grey Seals give birth later in the season than females which had already one or more pups. We wonder whether the trend to reproduce at an earlier date will continue till there will be a similar period of pupping in the Netherlands as in the Farne Islands colony, or than the more southern situated colony in the Netherlands will have its own reproduction period.

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References

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